DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 994 CE 079 180

TITLE	Minorities and Adult Learning: Communication among Majorities and Minorities. Adult Learning and the Challenges of the 21st Century. A Series of 29 Booklets Documenting Workshops Held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, Germany, July 14-18, 1997).
INSTITUTION	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Hamburg (Germany). Inst. for Education.
ISBN	ISBN-92-82010-89-9
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	14p.; For other booklets in this series, see CE 079 178-206.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: <http://www.education.unesco.org/uie>.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; Change Strategies; *Civil Rights; Classroom Techniques; Community Education; Conventional Instruction; Cultural Pluralism; Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Educational Legislation; Educational Needs; Educational Policy; *Educational Strategies; *Equal Education; Foreign Countries; Informal Education; Learning Processes; *Minority Groups; *Multicultural Education; Needs Assessment; Nonformal Education; Resource Allocation; State of the Art Reviews; Systems Approach

ABSTRACT

This booklet, which was produced as a follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, examines communication among minorities and nonminorities in adult education programs. The booklet begins with a sketch of the situation of minority group members around the world and a list of 10 ways education policy and legislation can advance minority rights. Discussed next is the importance of allocating resources for education so that the different levels of need and different barriers in areas are taken into account. The importance of recognizing minorities' learning systems is underscored. The following are among the eight recommendations for adult learning by and for minority communities: (1) include minority knowledge, culture, language, religion, lifestyle, and history in curricula in a manner promoting mutual respect and understanding between communities; (2) recognize the role and value of minorities' traditional out-of-school learning processes; (3) link educational activities with minorities' local economy, geography, and demography; (4) teach through different media; and (5) promote minorities' participation in an active learning environment. Concluding the booklet are lists of six elements of intercultural learning, nine formal and informal methods of intercultural adult learning, and three areas of follow-up in adult learning. (MN)

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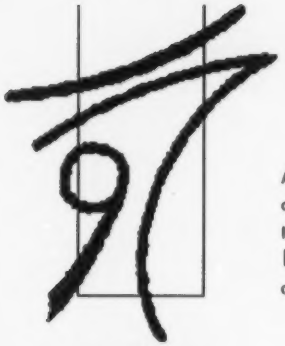

A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

1c Minorities and adult learning

Minorities and adult learning: communication among majorities and minorities

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This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

Readers are reminded that the points of view, selection of facts, and the opinions expressed in the booklets are those that were raised by panellists, speakers and participants during the workshop sessions and therefore do not necessarily coincide with official positions of the UNESCO or of the UNESCO Institute for Education Hamburg. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

Theme 1: Adult learning and the challenges of the 21st century

Booklets under this theme:

1a Adult learning, democracy and peace

1b Cultural citizenship in the 21st century:
adult learning and indigenous peoples

1c Minorities and adult learning:
communication among majorities and minorities

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ISBN 92 820 10 89-9
Design by Matthew Partridge, Hamburg
Printed by Druckerei Seemann, Hamburg
1999

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Minorities and adult learning:

communication among majorities and minorities

Introduction

"The way in which we treat minorities is the measure of civilisation of a society"
Mahatma Gandhi

The workshop on minorities at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) held in July 1997 in Hamburg, had an important role in examining the issue of the importance of adult learning for advancing minority rights and inter-community relationships. The basic thrust of the workshop was that majority and minority communities should work together towards a common issue of justice and towards common respect, dignity and security. For the first time the right to socio-cultural identity and the right to be different were acknowledged as important rights in adult learning policy.

The attendance of over 40 different minority (and indigenous) communities contributed significantly to arriving at a consensus on minority issues, which was part of a process of sharing information and experience. The workshop focused on adult learning needs of minority communities as well as on the need for majority communities to be informed about these communities and their rights.

The exchange was also useful in finding new methodologies in adult learning and matching these to concrete cases and locations. Civic education, it was felt, must address broad questions of peace and mutual respect and reflect the minority community's needs, rather than serving

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to assimilate minorities into the norms and values of the majority community. The potentially homogenising effect of national curricula needs to be avoided, and the role of minority knowledge and learning systems must be recognised. Adult learning must help minorities to practice their right to identify with their own traditions and livelihood systems, rather than inculcate imposed characteristics.

The thematic workshop was chaired by Saad Eddin Ibrahim, President of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies, Egypt. Panellists included Alan Phillips, Director of Minorities Rights Group UK; Mona Makram-Ebeid, President of Egypt's Association for the Advancement of Education and former Member of the Egyptian parliament; Smaranda Enache of Liga Pro Europa Romania; Teeka Bhattaria from Seacow, a non-governmental organisation working with indigenous minority groups in Nepal, and Ambassador Nowal K Rai, also from Nepal. The Minorities Rights Group UK played an important role in bringing people to this workshop.

The situation of minorities

Minorities have made great contributions throughout history, despite their marginalisation from economic and political life, and despite suffering social discrimination. Many have rich cultural traditions, and although many are known to have strong traditional health facilities, they often lack modern health facilities. Minorities are also known to have education systems based on livelihood systems in which social, cultural, economic and political elements are closely intertwined.

Although identifying minority groups can be difficult and, while it is almost impossible to find a universal agreement on a definition of minorities, the emerging consensus is: minority communities should be understood not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion or language, but also in terms of political, economic and social marginalisation. There is also a growing understanding of the importance and acceptance of minority rights which include many social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights. A recent example is the 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Articles 4 (3) and 4 (4) relate to education rights and state:

Article 4 (3)
"States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue."

Article 4 (4)
"States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole."

Civil rights, such as liberty and justice, are of particular significance to minorities. There is also the right to public education that promotes a supportive climate for equality and diversity. Certain social rights such as the right to associate, certain economic rights, such as the right to participate in community development, as well as cultural and linguistic rights are also of particular importance to minorities. Political rights

such as empowerment, participation and citizenship are among the most important rights, yet they are the most consistently denied. These range from participation in government to functional or geographical autonomy.

Political and legislative changes

The recognition of minority rights is fundamental to a truly democratic society. But the success of political reforms and legislation depends to a very large extent on the participation of both minority and majority communities, in addition to political will and competence.

Education Policy and Legislation

The following are some of the ways in which legislation can advance minority rights:

- Promoting minorities' rights and promoting the fullest participation of minorities in all areas of life;
- Setting up government departments that are actively involved in the recognition of the social integration of minorities;
- Accession and ratification of international instruments relating to minorities and education e.g. Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities;
- Developing autonomy arrangements for minority communities (including educational authorities) where appropriate;
- Establishing monitoring and review mechanisms such as ombudsmen to ensure coherent and positive government policies;
- Providing education in the first or mother tongue wherever possible and where desired by the community concerned;
- Curriculum reform to promote a realistic and positive inclusion of the minority history, culture, language, and identity (including any significant events in terms of minority/majority relations);
- Civil rights education of majority and minority communities;
- Entitlement to basic education for all (especially in remote areas or where minorities have low political visibility);
- Involvement of minority women in education, curriculum design, management and decision-making.

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However, legislation maynot fully reflect a country's international commitments. There are also problems in the political, economic and educational arena. The economic situation in many countries makes it difficult to endorse political reforms; local discriminatory policies against minorities are not uncommon. The media can often exacerbate inter-ethnic conflicts, fear and misunderstandings. Finally, attitudes to minorities change more slowly than legislation, and legislation and majority groups can be active in opposing the progress made with respect to reform.

In many countries, the curriculum ignores or rejects the experience of minority communities within that country. Although this can be most obvious in a history curriculum or in the choice of language of instruction, it can also be detected in others parts of the curriculum, such as civil education, geography, nutrition, literature, and so on. This has a twofold effect. Firstly, minorities feel that their identity, culture, language, history and their entire sense of belonging in that country is being undermined. Members of minority communities can become demotivated, fail to attend classes and fail to learn. Education which undermines identity in such ways is rarely ultimately effective, efficient or a good use of resources. Secondly, members of the majority community miss an important opportunity through education to learn about members of other communities. Such opportunities can, if appropriately designed and carried out, help to remove barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding between different communities.

The political will to change legislation and allocate resources should therefore be matched by changes in the education system in order to help ensure a stable, long-term development. States must recognise and support the education rights of minorities and more resources should be allocated to the education of minority communities in light of their contribution to society.

Allocation of Resources for Education

- States must ensure that at least adequate resources are allocated to all regions and communities taking into consideration different levels of need and different barriers in different areas;
- The provision of education in several languages will result in additional costs; however such provision is a right and should be make available wherever possible;
- The revision of curricula to include reference to and respect for minority communities may also involve additional expenditure;
- States must ensure that the lower political profile of many minority communities does not result in lower resource allocation to those areas or communities.

Recognising minorities' learning systems

In addition to states' support for the education rights of minorities (see box above), it needs to be emphasised that minorities have their own traditional learning systems based on out-of-school learning processes, compatible with their local economy, geography and social systems. Minority learning systems often build on local wisdom rather than book-based knowledge, are inextricably linked to livelihood systems, and passed down from one generation to the next. Learning systems are organic in that they take place within the community, by the community and are closely linked to a community's daily activities. Songs and music as well as other aspects of the culture of minorities often play an important role in motivating minorities to learn about themselves, their environment and the social and political context in which they exist. Adult learning systems should therefore acknowledge such informal learning systems for promoting minority cultures and identity.

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Recommendations for adult learning
by and for minority communities

- Allocation of educational resources reflecting the needs of different communities areas.
- A significant goal of minority adult learning is for minority communities to establish a sense of identity with their own traditions, roots and culture.
- Minority knowledge, culture, language, religion, lifestyle and history to be included in curricula in a way that promotes mutual respect and understanding between communities.
- Recognition of the role and value of traditional out-of-school learning processes of minorities;
- Participatory pedagogy relying on the strengths of minorities.
- Educational activities closely linked with minorities' own local economy, geography and demography, thus promoting compatible learning systems.
- Teaching through different media, including songs and music, as well as other aspects of culture with which minorities identify.
- Promoting the participation of minorities in an active learning environment, as an important way to demystify book-based knowledge and to give people a sense of confidence.

Intercultural adult learning

Lack of information about minority and majority communities and their respective cultures in different parts of the world is in part the result of the formal educational system. Only through cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect can the intolerance born of ignorance be overcome. The education system should provide not only information about different peoples' histories and cultures but an ethical framework as well. Civic education must address broad questions of peace and mutual respect.

Intercultural adult learning should involve the following:

- the sensitisation of both minorities and majorities on minority issues;
- the collective participation of minorities and majorities for creative solutions to minority problems;
- a healthy learning environment of positive pluralism;
- review of stereotypes so that knowledge and images of the other come closer to both reality and self-image of a minority community;
- respect for other religions, as well as learning experiences about other regions;
- opportunities for the majority to learn minority languages in minority areas.

There are many ways in which intercultural education can be disseminated. Target groups should include teachers, media, politicians, local governments, public servants and police officers.

Formal and informal methods of intercultural adult learning

- Extracurricular activities, such as guided tours;
- minority literature, publications and translations;
- media campaigns;
- museums;
- music and art;
- seminars, round tables, summer universities;
- academic studies in intercultural education;
- enhancing the role of NGOs and universities for intercultural education of adults;
- inviting sociologists and university teachers from minority groups to present their own history.

Follow-up

In the same way that women's networks started during the Mexico and Nairobi world conferences on women, it was suggested that minority networks should continue the work of the World Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA V, as well as act as an important lobby in future conferences. It was generally accepted that the issue of minority rights cuts across borders. The need to create a political framework within which adult learning could take place as well as the need to develop legal frameworks were crucial, as minority communities were those most lacking in opportunities.

Three areas of follow-up in adult learning

1 Prototypes of curricula and materials in adult learning for and by minority communities;
2 Materials on minority rights, minority culture and history for majorities and minorities;
3 Regional networks of adult educators and members of minorities.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 1

Adult learning and the challenges of the 21st century

Booklets under this theme:

a Adult learning, democracy and peace
b Cultural citizenship in the 21st century: adult learning and indigenous peoples
c Minorities and adult learning: communication among majorities and minorities